

COMMITTEE OF ONE HUNDRED

TO THE

CITIZENS OF NEW YORK

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OYL 11902

Box 57

OFFICE OF THE COMMITTEE OF ONE HUNDRED,
1212 Broadway, New York, August, 1886.

MR. —————

DEAR SIR : Will you kindly read the subjoined Address of the Committee of One Hundred ; and, if you approve the purposes of the committee, sign the roll of those who mean to secure them ?

CITIZENS OF NEW YORK :

The condition of your city government demands thoughtful attention. The current expenses of the city of New York for 1884, the latest year for which the detailed accounts are accessible, are stated by Mayor Grace in his message of January 4th, 1886, after deducting the amounts paid to redeem debt, the State taxes, and sums properly chargeable to former years, at \$33,834,812.96, or for each inhabitant, \$25.28.

This is vastly in excess of the cost of governing any other great city in the world ; and is from fifty to two hundred per cent greater than the cost of governing any city with which New York can fairly be compared.

The rate of increase of the cost of government, and of taxation to support it, is alarming. Thus :

In 1810 the current expenses for each inhabitant were \$1.25									
" 1836 " "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	2.00
" 1850 " "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	5.00
" 1877 " "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	20.00
" 1884 " "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	25.28

WHAT BECOMES OF THE MONEY?

No man has suggested that the enormous cost represents a corresponding superiority of public service. The inefficiency of our city government is almost as notorious as its extravagance. But the question is clearly answered by every responsible and impartial inquirer who has in recent years investigated the subject.

In 1875, the Governor appointed a commission to consider the subject of city government in this State, and to report a plan to the Legislature. After more than a year of labor this commission submitted an elaborate report to the Legislature of 1877, signed by William M. Evarts, Samuel Hand, E. L. Godkin, John A. Lott, Joshua M. Van Cott, James C. Carter, Oswald Ottendorfer, William Allen Butler, Simon Sterne and Henry F. Dimock.

These gentlemen say :

First, of the debt of this city : " It was abundantly sufficient for the construction of all the public works of a great

metropolis for a century to come, and to have adorned it besides with the splendors of architecture and art. Instead of this, the wharves and piers are, for the most part, temporary and perishable structures ; the streets are poorly paved ; the sewers in great measure imperfect and in bad order ; the public buildings shabby and inadequate. . . . In truth, the public debt of the city of New York, or the larger part of it, represents a vast aggregate of moneys wasted, embezzled, or misapplied."

Second, of the annual expenditure, that it has increased far more than is apparent from the published budgets, enormous sums being " every year exacted from the property owners in the form of special assessments," though " a very large part of it belongs to the account of ordinary repairs ;" but that, as clearly shown by the general budgets, " we have, during the past twenty-five years, . . . outrun all former examples of wastefulness, extravagance, and corrupt administration."

With this city particularly in view, they add : " We do not believe that, had the cities of this State, during the last twenty-five years, had the benefit . . . of competent and faithful officers, the aggregate of municipal debts would have amounted to one third of the present sum, nor the annual taxation one half of its present amount ; while the condition of these cities . . . would have been far superior to what is now exhibited."

More recently two elaborate investigations of the city

government have been attempted by committees of the Senate, one in 1880, the other in 1885. The report of each of them, supported by a mass of evidence, confirms at every point the conclusions of Governor Tilden's commission cited above. Those three important official investigations of city affairs combine to show :

1. That more than one half of the taxes paid to the city produce no public benefit ; that, after deducting the legacies of past extravagance and corruption in the existing debt and in the maintenance and repairs of property, more than a third of these taxes are, through various channels, distributed among political managers and their adherents, supporting a large and increasing body of men, whose business is, by the machinery of the city government, to extract money from you and appropriate it to themselves. The amount of your money which is thus worse than wasted every year is more than the interest of \$500,000,000 at three per cent, the rate upon most of the debt recently contracted ; and the continuance of this system of organized plunder is a greater burden to the city than a mortgage at that rate and for that amount; almost one half of the assessed valuation of real estate in the city and county of New York.

2. That this system is maintained and made possible by a combination of causes, the removal of which will require radical changes both in our laws and in the administration of them.

3. That the acts of the Legislature at any time in force, which together constitute at that time the charter of the city, form an immense and complicated body of law, ill-digested and inconsistent in many of its parts, and every year made more confused and more unintelligible by changes or additions, framed under the dictation of special interests. The nominal executive head of the city has but an imperfect control of the several departments ; the heads of nearly all the departments have a divided responsibility, and the whole framework of the government seems designed to protect incapacity and conceal corruption.

4. That the connection of municipal offices with national and State politics gives the control of these offices to the managers of the political parties, in their local factions and associations ; that they are awarded in payment of partisan or personal services, or in return for promises which make our public servants the tools of irresponsible "bosses."

WHO ARE THE SUFFERERS ?

No long argument is needed to show where the burden falls. The simplest consideration shows that if owners could not get so much for the use of their capital in New York as in Brooklyn or Philadelphia, they would go away with it. In the long run, they must be paid as much for interest or rent, on every thousand dollars, here as elsewhere. If, then, the city takes nearly three per cent every year in

taxes, this amount must be added, by the landlord to his rent, and by the tenant who pays the rent to the goods or services which he sells. Every man who has to find food and home and raiment for his family in this city knows that he has to pay more for smaller rooms, poorer fare, and meaner clothes than in any other place upon the continent. It is the wages of industry out of which the vast stealings of city politics are taken. Thus, every workingman is lodged less comfortably and less healthfully, his children are worse fed, his leisure hours are shortened, and he is robbed of a material part of the prosperity and happiness he fairly earns. The whole community suffers, except those who receive an undue share of the spoils, but it is the earner of wages who is most cruelly wronged.

Citizens of New York, if an army of foreign invaders should encamp in your public buildings and your streets, threatening to extort from you the yearly revenues of an empire at the point of the sword, how long would you endure their presence? Not one of two hundred thousand New Yorkers would hold his life too dear to set at risk for their destruction. But the evil now to be met is graver, though the call is not to arms. The wealth that violence could take from us might be replaced by patient industry. But who shall restore to a community its lost honor? The thirst for private gain has become the controlling and avowed motive in seeking and administering your public offices. Your city fathers sell their ordinances. Your rulers, with

more power over your property and with more intimate relations to your lives than feudal monarchs ever had among their subjects, traffic in their appointments and public contracts. Capitalists, householders, merchants, and laborers are taught that, while there is no way to obtain justice, there is a way to buy favor, now with money, now with votes. Corruption spreads through all business and all society ; and the name of your city is made a byword throughout the world. To acquiesce in all this now is to prepare degeneracy for your children, and to invite future generations to find in New York a den of thieves. You have power to put an end to it. Let every citizen who has nothing to lose, but much to gain, by requiring that the business of the city be carried on as a public trust, unite with us in a persistent effort for reform, and success will be speedy and certain. In the interests of no man, of no party and of no faction, but of our beautiful and beloved city alone, we ask you to enroll your names with ours, as those of men who will work and vote together to secure in New York a city government which shall be truly of the people, by the people, and for the people.

The principles which will guide our efforts are expressed in the resolutions adopted by your great mass-meeting of June 2d. The particular measures to be adopted must be determined when a sufficient number of citizens shall have sanctioned these principles to make the final expression of their will irresistible. The entire separation of our local

affairs from national and State politics, the control of them by the people of the city in their own interests, the concentration of responsibility, the simplification of administrative duties and of accounts, and the selection of all municipal officers on the ground of integrity and capacity alone, are the ends we seek ; and we ask you to join us in devising and promoting means to secure them.

Respectfully yours,

THE COMMITTEE OF ONE HUNDRED,

HENRY A. OAKLEY,

Chairman.

ROBERT A. VAN WYCK,

Secretary.



